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SUBJECT: BELARUS: SWITZERLAND WEIGHS VISA BAN, TARGETED
SANCTIONS

REF: STATE 46172

1.(SBU) Summary: The Swiss government has criticized the elections in Belarus and called upon authorities to immediately release persons arrested during the demonstrations following the vote. Switzerland has also warned that it would consider targeted sanctions and entry bans for leading Belarus officials. Bern has no specific timetable for a decision on actions against Belarus, according to an Embassy contact, who added that, as a practical matter, the Swiss will move in consort with the EU.
End summary.

2.(SBU) The Swiss Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) on March 27 released a press release calling on Belarus authorities to immediately release those people arrested after peaceful demonstrations following the March 19 elections. The release singles out Aleksander Kozulin for individual mention. The press release also reiterated regrets about the elections, which "did not meet recognized international standards for free and fair elections."

3.(SBU) Most notably, the March 27 press release warns Belarus of the possibility of sanctions and an entry ban. "If the political situation does not improve rapidly and durably, Switzerland will consider the possibility of targeted sanctions against Belarus. It could also impose entry bans on leading Belarus officials."

4.(SBU) According to Norbert Baerlocher of the DFA's Human Rights Office, there is no timetable for considering these sanction measures. He confided that there was considerable uncertainty whether targeted sanctions or entry bans would have any meaningful impact on President Lukashenko. Asked by Poloff whether Switzerland would follow the lead of the EU, Baerlocher asserted that Bern did not want to be seen as following the EU. For example, Switzerland had been the first European country to enact measures against Uzbekistan following its 2004 elections. However, as a practical matter, Baerlocher agreed that Switzerland would likely work in consort with the EU on possible measures.
Willeford